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# Perilous rescue from above Atlanta mill fire

## Helicopter whisks trapped crane operator to safety in televised rescue

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Web posted at: 6:30 PM EDT (2139 GMT)

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A helicopter pilot and firefighter rescue a trapped crane operator from above the mill fire

COURTESY: WISER/WXIA

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CNN's Tom Watkins reports on the fire and the dramatic rescue  
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**ATLANTA** (CNN) -- A firefighter dangling from a helicopter plucked a trapped crane operator to safety Monday as flames from a raging building fire 20 feet below grew perilously close.

Spectators on the ground burst into applause as the two men were flown to a grassy area. When the crane operator was lowered to the ground, he walked to a stretcher and was rushed to a hospital.

The construction worker, 49-year-old Ivers Sims, had been trapped for more than an hour by the fire that engulfed an old cotton mill being converted to loft apartments in eastern Atlanta. The cab of the crane had begun to burn minutes before he was rescued.

Sims crawled to the end of the crane's horizontal arm to get away from the flames and black smoke rising from the large, red brick building.

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He seemed calm and alert as he lay on his stomach waiting to be rescued, the crane swaying in winds that gusted above 20 mph.

## More than one rescue attempt

The first helicopter that attempted to rescue the man backed off when the smoke and wind became too much to handle safely.

Boyd Clines, a Department of Natural Resources pilot used to fighting forest fires, answered a desperate appeal from the fire department for a second rescue attempt.

Clines said flames and smoke made the flight turbulent as he lifted firefighter Matt Mosley up to the top of the crane and kept the helicopter hovering as the victim was strapped into a harness.

He was trying to fly quickly, he said, because "the crane was on fire. It was kind of a time limit. We didn't have all day to do it."

Larry Rogers, who flew with Clines to guide the pilot and the cable, said the flames were intensely hot.

"I had to put my visor down," Rogers said. "The heat was pretty tough. We were 80 feet above the crane."

The pilot said it took courage to go even lower.

"He (Mosley) is the real hero, because he put his life on the line to hang below this helicopter and get the man off the crane," Clines said. "I'm just glad we made it in time."

## Hero with skill and sense of humor



Mosley said he tried to lighten the tension during the rescue by telling Sims that his boss had sent him up there "so he could knock off early."

"That helped lighten things up a little bit. He was pretty much calm," Mosley said.

"It was nerve-racking. Sitting here on the ground waiting is the hardest part. Once you got up there ... training and your instinct takes over and you don't think about the rest of this," Mosley said.

What was Mosley thinking as he dangled high above the fire?

"I hope the rope doesn't break," he said. "That was really the only thing

I was worried about."

Sims, an independent contractor from an Alabama construction company, was trying to help contain the blaze aboard the crane when became trapped.

Howard Zaleznak, a Georgia Medical Center emergency room physician, said Monday evening that Sims was under observation, in stable condition and doing well. He was being treated for exposure to high heat and smoke inhalation.

## Hot show in town

Local television stations, CNN and the broadcast networks all carried the dramatic rescue live. Motorists pulled over on usually congested roads leading into the city's business district to join crowds of gawkers watching the fast spreading fire and dramatic rescue on a brilliantly sunny spring afternoon.

"This gentleman and this firefighter ought to have a heroes' parade down Peachtree Street," said one local resident. "This is even better than the World Series, better than the Falcons Championship."

The mill was being renovated into residential lofts, a highly touted gentrification project that was designed to rejuvenate one of the city's most blighted districts.

The structure, built in the 1880s, was consumed by the fire. The inside of the brick building was mostly wood, and the wood beams were thought to have been treated with oil, which likely helped spread the fire. Dry, very windy conditions also fed the flames.

Television images showed [three homes](#) a block away from the warehouse that caught fire from windborne embers. The roof on one of the homes had been destroyed by the blaze.

WSB-TV reported that the mill fire began as a trash fire on the building's fourth or fifth floor and spread very quickly.

*The [Associated Press](#) contributed to this report.*

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